

# Paul of Antioch

Dr David Coffey  
January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## 5.0. THE TIMES LEADING UP TO THE CRUSADES

In the 10th century the Roman Church stood at a crossroads in its relationship with the Islamic community.



Pope Gregory in the last affirmation to al-Nasir, a Muslim prince: “There is a charity which we owe to each other ... because we recognize and confess one sole God, although in different ways, and we praise and worship Him every day as creator and ruler of the world.”

## 5.0. DISCUSSION FOLLOWING THE CRUSADES CHARACTERIZED BY NEW POLEMIC

Pope Urban had not such positive regard for Muslims and called for “Cross Wars” from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to retake the Holy Land.

The Crusades indelibly changed the nature of constructive missionary dialogue using admitted truths which had been built up between Muslims and Oriental Christians.

From the time of the Crusades most discussions between Muslims and Christians were held along the lines of logical dialectic to prove the other’s arguments false.





The Sack of [Constantinople](#) occurred in April 1204 and marked the culmination of the [Fourth Crusade](#). Crusader armies captured, looted, and destroyed parts of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire.

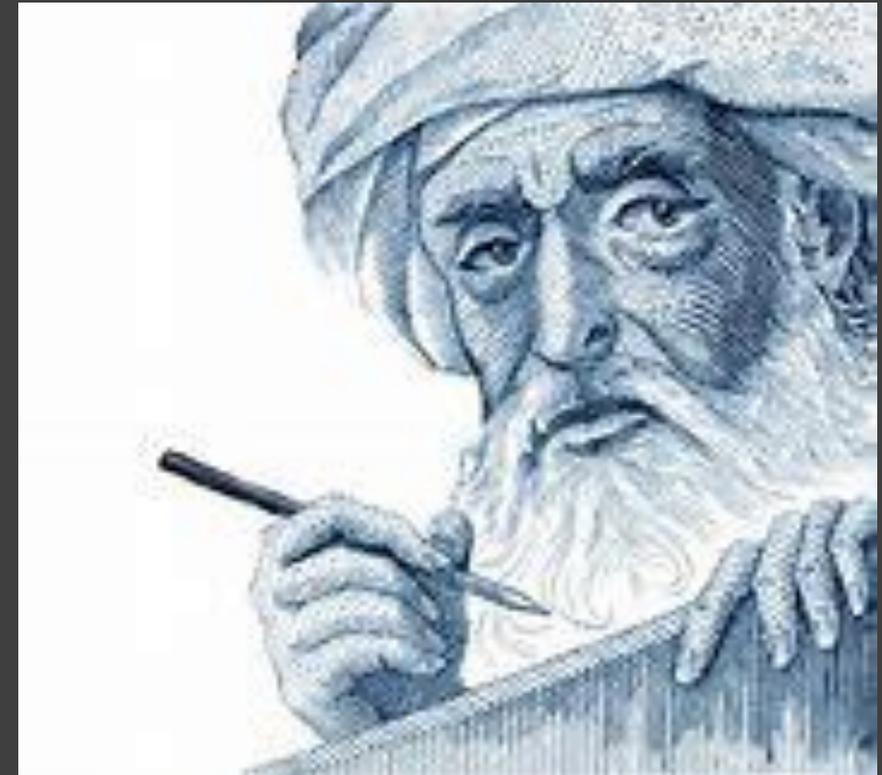
The Crusader Sack of Constantinople (1206) by Pope Innocent III proved its intent to destroy Constantinople, seat of the Orthodox Church.

# MUSLIMS AND THE NEW POLEMIC

Ibn Hazm (994-1064) in his *Kitab al-fisal fi'l-milal wa'l-nihal*, (Book of Discernment between Confessions and Sects) contained an attack on Christianity in which any slight deviation from the Qur'an renders a corresponding Christian idea fallacious.



Ibn Hazm made a brilliant attempt to divorce the supernatural Christ of the Christian faith in Bible from the "historical" Jesus from extra-Biblical sources who, in his opinion, was the Jesus of Islam. This work was, perhaps, the first 'higher critical' work.



# CHRISTIANS AND THE NEW POLEMIC

- Dominican missionaries following the theological presuppositions of Thomas Aquinas used the New Polemic.
- They considered the use of philosophical arguments legitimate for "defensive" purposes, that is to show the weakness of Islamic arguments against the Christian faith. Hitti, *The History of the Arabs*, p. 289.



## RESULTING USE OF THE NEW POLEMIC

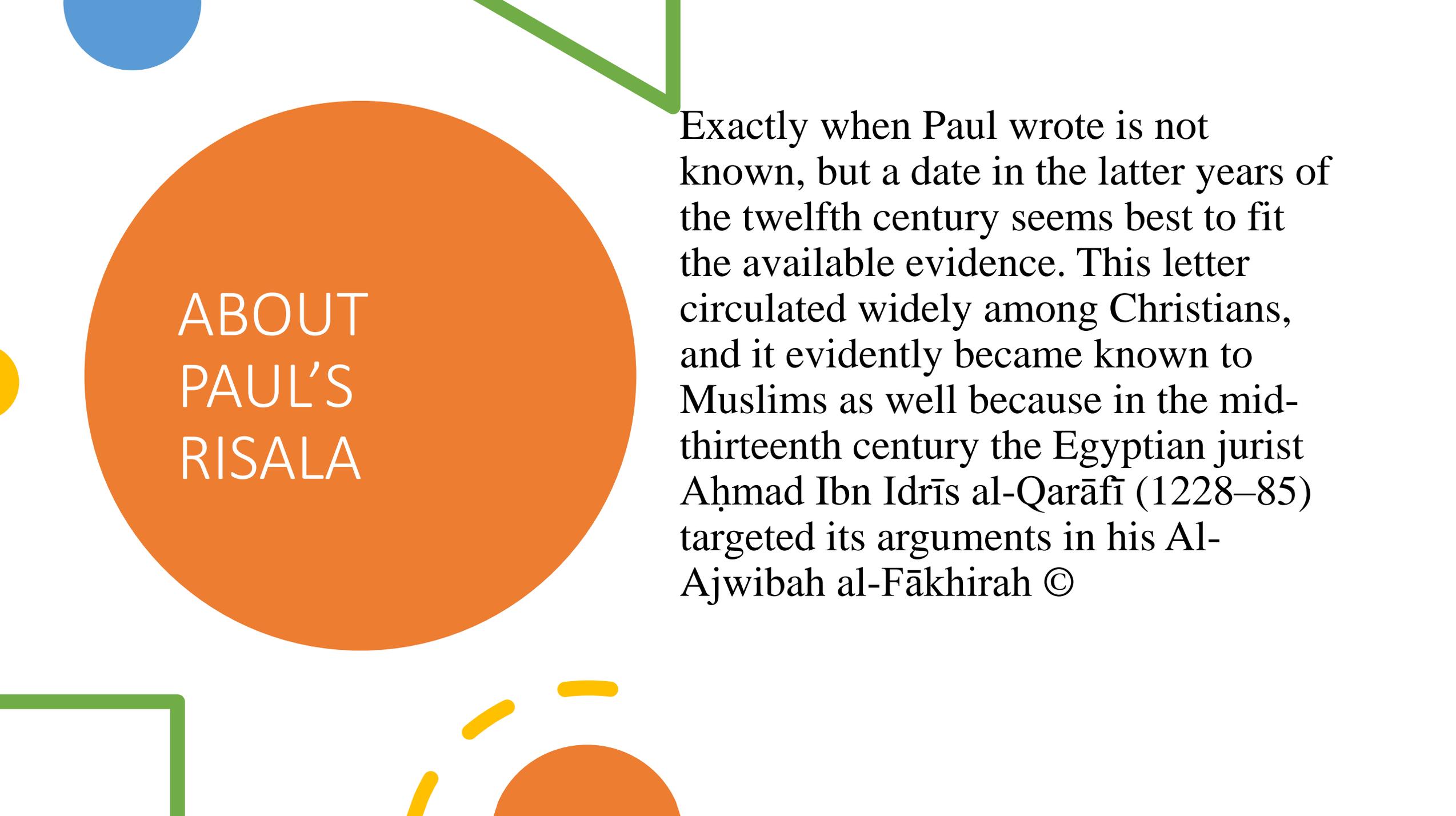
- logical dialectic was a sport mirroring battlefield.
- Exp. debate in 1217 in Aleppo between Anba Girgi and three Muslim scholars; no one changed their position but shook hands before and after.



FROM THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE PAUL OF ANTIOCH'S RISSALA (1180 d.)  
WAS A BRIGHT LIGHT AGAINST THE CRUSADES' DARK BACKDROP

- Following 9<sup>th</sup> C. only Paul of Antioch (d. 1180) a Melkite Bishop of Sidon revived the method of dialogue using admitted truths.
- Paul of Antioch's *Risala ila ba'd asdiqa'ihl al-Muslimin* (*Letter to Muslim Friends*) is the best example of the use of Admitted Truths.
- The Arabic letter of 20 pages claimed that Islam teaches Christianity to be a true religion according to the Qur'an itself.





## ABOUT PAUL'S RISALA

Exactly when Paul wrote is not known, but a date in the latter years of the twelfth century seems best to fit the available evidence. This letter circulated widely among Christians, and it evidently became known to Muslims as well because in the mid-thirteenth century the Egyptian jurist Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfī (1228–85) targeted its arguments in his *Al-Ajwibah al-Fākhirah* ©

## SURVEY OF PAUL OF ANTIOCH'S RISALA

1. Muhammad as sent to the Pagan Arab only, not to Christians, Suras: xii:2; xiv:4; 2:7.

2. The Qur'an praises the Christians and their faith, Suras: iii:55; lvii:27; xxii:40.

3. The Qur'an confirms the authenticity of the Christian Scriptures, Suras: iii:3; x:94; xlii:15.

4. The Qur'an praises monks and the Eucharist or Holy Communion, Suras: v:82; xxii:17; v:112-115.

5. The doctrine of the Trinity [in contrast to tri-theism] conforms to reason, the use of the Bible and even to the Qur'an, as is shown by the Bismala, and by Suras: iv:171; xix:34.

6. This doctrine, (that is the doctrine of the Trinity) when rightly understood, is compatible with monotheism.

7. Christ came as the "Word of God", the best gift He could make to man, and as a result his Law is perfect and cannot be abrogated.

Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 168.

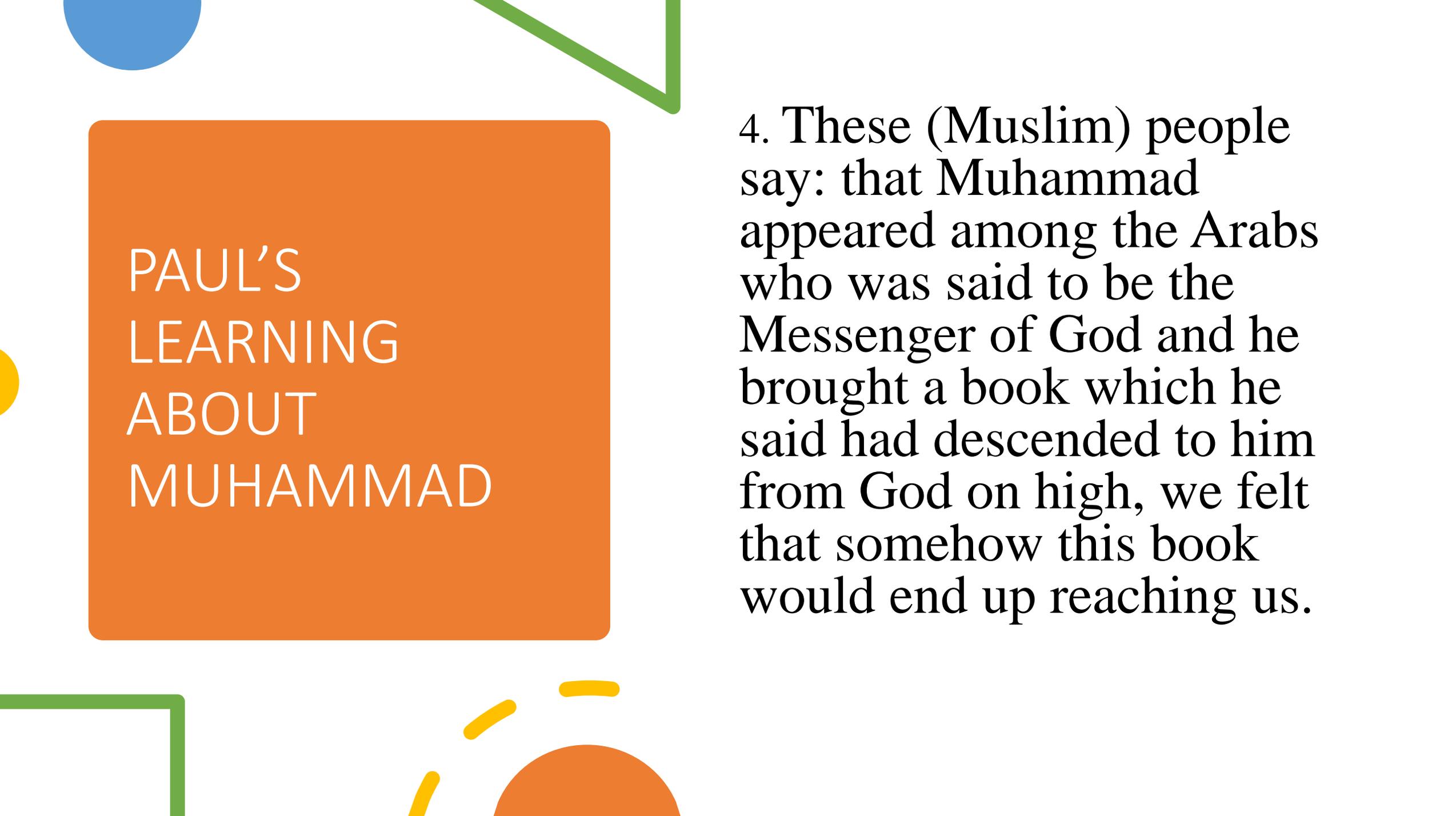
SOME MUSLIMS REGARDED PAUL'S RISALA AN ACCOUNT OF ADMITTED TRUTHS IN THE QUR'AN AND BIBLE; OTHERS, AN INGENIOUSLY SUBVERSIVE LETTER

- The story of this correspondence begins with Paul of Antioch's Risala in only 20 pages. Paul was a Melkite bishop of Sidon and he carefully and politely worded a letter which some Muslims highly regarded and others thought of as an ingeniously subversive letter to a Muslim friend.<sup>1</sup>
- Writing in Arabic, he employed the personae of Christian scholars in Europe to demonstrate that in its own terms the Quran proves that Muḥammad was sent with an Arabic revelation to the pagan Arabs alone, and that its teachings give unmistakable indications that the main elements of Christian belief and practice are sound and God-given.

## SALUTATION FROM PAUL OF ANTIOCH TO A MUSLIM FRIEND

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the God of one substance, trinity of natures. From the humble monk Paul of Antioch, Bishop of Sidon, letter to one of his Muslim friends in Sidon.

- 2. God leads you as well as us to search to see light in actions which lead to the Garden and deliver from the Fire.
- 3. On my journey in some Byzantine territories I was able to meet some leaders about Mohammad, blessed of God.



PAUL'S  
LEARNING  
ABOUT  
MUHAMMAD

4. These (Muslim) people say: that Muhammad appeared among the Arabs who was said to be the Messenger of God and he brought a book which he said had descended to him from God on high, we felt that somehow this book would end up reaching us.

PAUL: “CLARIFY WHY HAVE NOT MUSLIMS FOLLOWED MUHAMMAD’S WORDS?”

5. I said: Since you have heard talk of this Messenger and that you have made efforts to have among you the Book which he brought, for what reason have you not followed it? Especially as in the Book it says, “Whoever desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter, he will be among the ranks of the lost1 .” 1 (Qur’an 3/85 (B99/79)).—

## FIRST CLARIFICATION AS TO WHY QUR'AN'S WISDOM OF GOD IS DIFFICULT FOR MUSLIMS TO FOLLOW?

- 6. – They: One is that the Book is in Arabic and not in our language, according to what is said there, “We have sent down the Qur’an in Arabic in order that you may learn wisdom ” 2 ; Cf. Qur’an 12/2 (B79/2); 20/113 (B57/112); 42/7 (B85/5).
- and also: “It is He who has raised among the Gentiles a prophet from among themselves, who brought them his signs, to purify them and instruct them in the Book and Wisdom; although they had been before in manifest error” 3 Qur’an 62/2 (B96/2).;

## SECOND CLARIFICATION AS TO WHY THE QUR'AN IS DIFFICULT FOR OTHER PEOPLES TO RECEIVE?

---

“That you may warn a people to whom no “warner” has come before you; in order that they may be rightly guided”  
Fn. 4 Qur'an 32/3 (B71/2) ;

and also: “Thus we have sent by inspiration to you an Arabic Qur'an that you may warn the Mother of cities and all around her, and warn them of the Day of Assembly, of which there is no doubt” FN 5 Qur'an 42/7 (B85/5).;

## THIRD CLARIFICATION AS TO WHY WAS THE QUR'AN SEEMINGLY SENT TO A PARTICULAR PEOPLE?

“In order that you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned, and who, therefore, remain oblivious”<sup>6</sup> Qur'an 36/6 (B62/5).

; and also “And admonish your relatives and the ones nearest you”<sup>7</sup> Qur'an 26/214 (B58/214)..”

# WHY IS THERE NO OBLIGATION FOR CHRISTIANS TO FOLLOW THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET?

---

The Prophet would not be sent to us, but towards the Arabs who were in Ignorance, of whom he said that there had not come to them a “warner” before him; and that there was not an obligation for us to follow him, for messengers had been sent to us before him, who addressed us in our own languages, warned us and gave to us the Torah and the New Testament in our languages.

# PAUL: "BUT THE QUR'AN SHOULD BE READ AS IT CONTAINS TRUTHS THAT JESUS AND MARY ARE SIGNS"

But we (Christians) derived great benefit from the Qur'an because we discovered great praise of the Lord Christ and his Mother, and that God made of them a sign for the peoples, that when he said: "And she who guarded her chastity; We breathed into her from Our spirit, and we made her and her son a sign for all peoples" Fn. 8; (Qur'an 21/9 (B67/91) cf. 66/12 (B111/12));

# FIRST SIGN WHY A CHRISTIAN SHOULD READ THE QUR'AN.

---

The Qur'an should be read because it testifies to the signs of Christ: that he did miracles, that he was conceived not from the action of a man, but by the announcement of the Angel of God to his Mother and that God made of them a sign for the nations, that he had spoken since being in the cradle<sup>10</sup> Cf. 3/45-47 (B99/40-42); 19/16-33 (B60/16-34).

## SECONDLY, BECAUSE THE QUR'AN TESTIFIES TO THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST

The Qur'an should be read by all because it testifies to the miracles of Christ. It states that He brought the dead back to life, cured the blind, brought lepers back to the world, made with clay the shape of an inanimate creature, breathed on it, and it became living with the permission of God<sup>11</sup>, Qur'an 3/49 (B99/43); 5/110 (B116/110).

THIRDLY, BECAUSE THE QUR'AN CORRECTLY STATES  
THE TITLES/ESSENCE OF CHRIST ARE:  
"HIS" (GOD'S) WORD AND "HIS (GOD'S) SPIRIT"

- Finally, the Qur'an reads that Jesus is described as His Word and His Spirit Fn.12. Cf. 4/171 (B102/169). That conforms to our way of seeing concerning Christ and our belief.

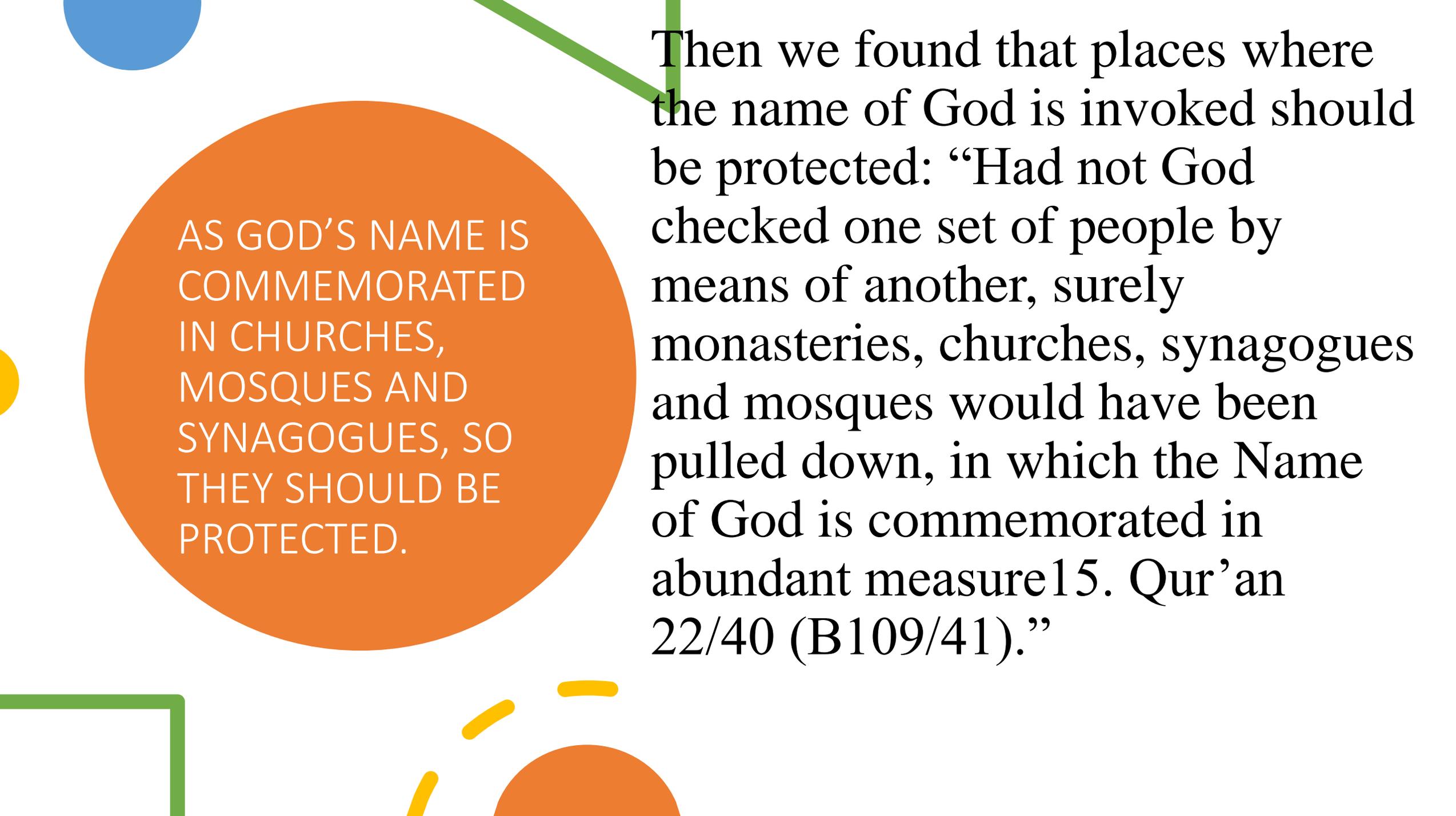
## FOURTHLY, THE QUR'AN SPEAKS OF JESUS BEING RAISED TO GOD

10. We have found in the Qur'an also that God raised Christ towards Him, and placed those who followed him above those who were unbelievers, until the day of the Resurrection when it said: "When God said: Oh. Jesus, son of Mary, I will take you and raise you to myself, I will separate you from those who blaspheme and I will put those who follow you above those who reject faith, until the Day of Resurrection" Fn.13

Qur'an 3/55 (B99/48) cf. 4/158 (B102/156).;

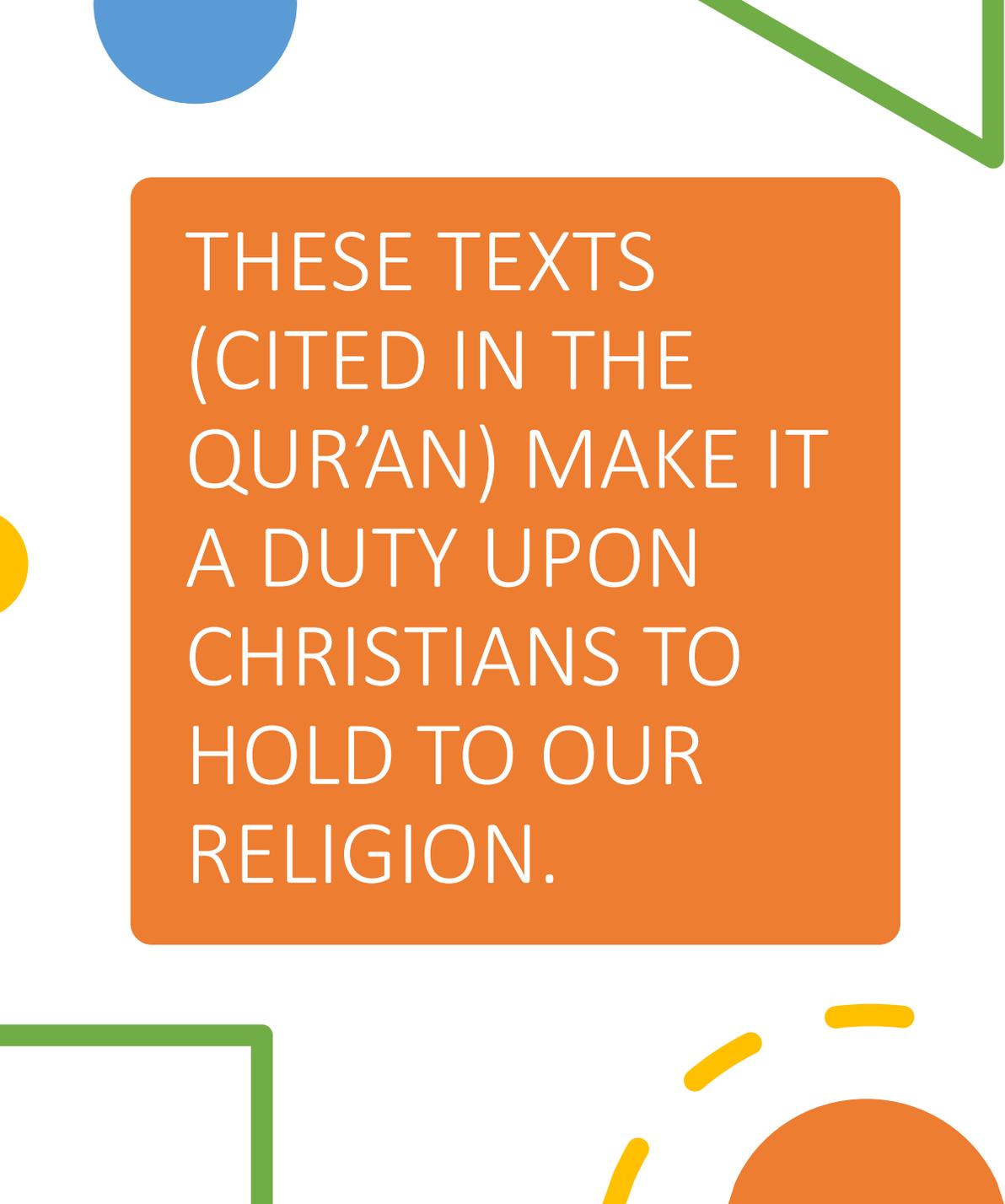
JESUS GIVEN  
THE GOSPEL  
AND HIS  
DISCIPLES  
GIVEN  
COMPASSION  
AND MERCY

And one reads in the Qur'an: "We sent after them Jesus, the son of Mary and bestowed on him the Gospel and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy<sup>14</sup>. Qur'an 57/27 (B101/27); cf. 5/46 (B116/50)."



AS GOD'S NAME IS  
COMMEMORATED  
IN CHURCHES,  
MOSQUES AND  
SYNAGOGUES, SO  
THEY SHOULD BE  
PROTECTED.

Then we found that places where the name of God is invoked should be protected: “Had not God checked one set of people by means of another, surely monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques would have been pulled down, in which the Name of God is commemorated in abundant measure<sup>15</sup>. Qur’an 22/40 (B109/41).”



THESE TEXTS  
(CITED IN THE  
QUR'AN) MAKE IT  
A DUTY UPON  
CHRISTIANS TO  
HOLD TO OUR  
RELIGION.

12. These texts and others make it a duty upon us to hold to our religion, not to abandon our way, nor to reject that which we have, nor to follow any other than the Lord Christ, Word of God and his Apostles which He sent to us to warn us.



## THE RESPONSE (BLOWBACK?) TO PAUL'S RISALA

Paul of Antioch, D. 1180 CE put a lot of textual research and analysis into his Risala of only 20 pages claiming that Islam teaches Christianity to be a true religion according to the Qur'an. To appreciate the enormity of this effort, bear in mind that his writing was accomplished during the Crusades when both Muslims and Christians had scant regard for the other's faith.

# PAUL'S LETTER USED BY A CHRISTIAN IN CYPRUS

---

One hundred years later just before 1316 an unknown Christian author resident in Cyprus wrote in Paul of Antioch's style claiming that Islam teaches that Christianity is a true religion. We don't know the name of this writer, but he likely had access to Paul's *Risala*.

He wrote with the evident intention of opening a debate with Muslims, because in 1316 a copy was sent to Ibn Taymīyah in Damascus, and then five years later another was sent to Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ṭālib, a local Islamic celebrity in the Damascus area.

# COMPARISON OF LETTERS SHOWS EACH AUTHOR EDITED TO FIT HIS OUTCOME IN ARGUMENTATION

Dr. David Thomas notes: “A close comparison of the two letters shows that the anonymous author approached Paul’s letter conservatively, but with his own clear intentions.

He completed quotations from the Quran that Paul had edited down in order to fit his arguments, he removed some of the more pointed exegeses of verses used by Paul to bring out Christian significances, and he added a long series of verses from the Quran and Bible, mainly the Old Testament.

Thus, he removed quotations that might have caused unnecessary offense to Muslims, and reduced the chances of his version of the letter provoking disagreement.”

6 David Thomas, “Paul of Antioch’s Letter to a Muslim Friend and The Letter from Cyprus,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam: the First Thousand Years*, ed. idem (Leiden, 2001), 203–21.

# LETTER TO CYPRUS BEGINS WITH STRIKING REASONS WHY CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM ARE MUTUAL FAITHS

Firstly, ~~The~~ *Letter to Cyprus* emphasizes both the Qur'an and Bible find common cause to disparage the Jews.

Secondly, Christians adhere to the Word of the Prophets and Apostles and called "those Thou hast favoured" superceding the Jews. Muslims also are viewed in this historical train as they acknowledge Jesus.

Thirdly, the author implies that Muḥammad and Islam are part of God's plan as the Prophet was sent to the Arabs with an Arabic scripture and was sent from God as an inspired messenger.

# ISLAMIC RESPONSES TO *THE LETTER FROM CYPRUS*

---

- Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and Muhammad b. Abi~ Talib used the revised version ("Letter from Cyprus").
- Ibn Taymiyya's response was detailed and comprehensive (in four volumes totaling in all 1400 pages)



# IBN TAYMIYAH'S REPLY TO *THE LETTER FROM CYPRUS*

Ibn Taymīyah replied with the *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-Man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*, (*The Correct Reply to Those who altered Christ's Religion.*) a detailed exposure of Christianity that is not rivalled in the whole of Islam for detail and length.

However, Ibn Taymīyah pays little regard to the arguments from Cyprus, rather shows to Muslims that the letter leads away from the path of true faith by distorted interpretations.

While he quotes the letter at length, he does not so much give answers to it as employ it as a warning to Muslims of any deviation from the Quran.

Thus, his *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is not addressed to the author from Cyprus or even to Christians, but to Muslims, accusing Christianity from departing from monotheism.

# Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ṭālib (Al-Dimashqī’s) Response to The Letter from Cyprus

Dimashqī’s summary: “They were opening up means of seeking a confrontation through *The Letter from Cyprus*, under the impression that they had mastered what they had been assured was teaching. Whereas all it is attempting to do is either to confuse Muslims or convert them.”

Al-Dimashqī gets into the main argument of the Jawāb in response to the first claim he identifies in the letter, namely that Muḥammad appeared without warning rather than after announcements from earlier prophets and the miraculous signs that were conventionally associated with each advent of a prophet.

In reference to Muḥammad Al-Dimashqī systematically presents a long string of proof texts and stories to counter it. He begins with a series of quotations from the Old and New Testaments that had been seen by Muslims to contain references to the Prophet. and some, such as the riders on the ass and the camel of Isaiah and the promises of the coming of the Paraclete in the Last Supper discourses in John 15 and 16, which were commonplace.



## DIMASHQI DISDAINED JESUS' CRUCIFIXION IN THE LETTER TO CYPRUS

Dimashqi's disdain is well demonstrated in his concluding comment to his examination of the Christian account in *The Letter from Cyprus* of the death of Christ:

“If anyone were to relate to you part of this tragic joke from other people, and reported that they had cut themselves off from humankind in a corner of the earth, and that this doctrine was theirs, this creed theirs, and this supposition about the Lord of the worlds was theirs, would you people regard them as reasonable, call them people of religion, say that they followed the religion of any prophet, or had any serious purpose?

**NO!”**

# THE RESPONSE: CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS GOD'S POWER AND WISDOM

## **Acts 1:18, 19**

18 “ the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

- “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
- the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

SUMMARY: ADMITTED TRUTH INTRODUCED BY JOHN OF DAMASCUS, RESTATED BY MAR TIMOTHY AND FULFILLED BY PAUL OF ANTIOCH WAS ABANDONED IN THE 12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.

From the 8th century Muslims and Christians often entertained one of two objectives in dialogue, the first being to prove one's position superior, the second to gain an adherent to one's position.

Two different methods were used in achieving these objectives. The method of logical dialectic tends to seek the first objective, while admitted truths opens up the possibility of the second.

In the 12th century, the Crusades drew a curtain across reasoned enquiry into the beliefs of another faith and admitted truths so that disputation was the accepted form of discourse.